



## **CHILD SAFETY AND SECURITY TIPS**

SDPD Crime Prevention

April 29, 2016

### **CONTENTS**

#### **BASIC SAFETY MEASURES**

#### **SITUATIONAL SAFETY MEASURES**

Making 911 Calls

In Day or Home Care

In a New Neighborhood

Going to and From School

Out and Away from Home

Returning Home Alone

At Home Alone

Babysitting

In Stores and Other Public Places

At an Amusement or Theme Park

Trick-or-Treating on Halloween

Living at School or Elsewhere Away from Home

#### **USING THE INTERNET AND CELL PHONES**

Minimizing Internet Dangers

Dangers of Social Networking

Cyberbullying

Reporting Attempted Sexual Exploitation

Preventing Cyber Crimes

Additional Information

#### **BULLYING**

#### **HOME VIDEO GAMES**

#### **PROTECTING YOUR CHILD'S IDENTITY**

#### **SELECTING A CHILD CARE CENTER OR FAMILY CHILD CARE HOME**

#### **SELECTING A NANNY OR BABYSITTER FOR HOME CHILD CARE**

TrustLine

California Home Care Aide Registry

Hiring a Child Caregiver Privately

Supervising a Home Caregiver

#### **REPORTING CHILD ABUSE**

#### **REPORTING A CHILD WHO APPEARS TO BE LOST**

This paper contains tips on child safety and security for parents and guardians. They are simple, common sense suggestions that will help keep your children from being easy targets for a criminal. They deal with basic and situational safety measures, using the Internet and cell phones, bullying, home video games, protecting your children's identity, selecting a child care center or family child care home, selecting a nanny or babysitter for home child care, reporting child abuse, and reporting a child who appears to be lost.

Additional tips on cybersecurity, home security, vehicle security, travel safety and security, personal safety and security, senior safety and security, preventing crimes against businesses, preventing fraud and identity theft, reporting crime and suspicious activities, reporting suspicious activities for terrorism prevention, reporting disorder

and other problems, obtaining crime information, dealing with homeless people, and starting a Neighborhood Watch program are available in the CRIME PREVENTION AND EDUCATION section of the SDPD website at [www.sandiego.gov/police](http://www.sandiego.gov/police).

## **BASIC SAFETY MEASURES**

- Know where your children are and who they will be with at all times. Have them return home promptly at appointed times.
- Have them check in with you when they arrive at or depart from their planned destination, and when there is a change of plans.
- Teach them how to make calls from landline and cell phones both in and outside your area code.
- Let your children know where you will be at all times and how to get in touch with you. Have your children carry a contact card with your full name, cell phone number, work location, and work phone numbers on it. It should also have contact information of trusted adults they could call in an emergency if they can't get in touch with you. They are people you can rely on and with whom your children feel comfortable.
- Have your children carry an identification card with their full name, address, and home phone number on it. Tell them that this information is personal and should only be given out to a trusted adult.
- Have a way to contact your children if you will be late in picking them up, meeting them somewhere, coming home, etc.
- Never let a young child go anywhere alone. Make sure another trusted adult is present if you cannot be there.
- Make sure older children, who have more freedom, always go out with friends and fully understand all safety rules.
- Know what your children wear every day. Don't put their names on the outside of their clothes or items they carry. Children may respond more readily to a stranger who calls them by name.
- Keep a record of your children's friends and their phone numbers.
- Keep an updated information file on your children. Include pictures, fingerprints, footprints, physical characteristics, identifying marks, medical and dental records, etc.
- Find out why your children don't want to be with someone or go somewhere. The reason may be more than a personality conflict or a lack of interest.
- Notice when anyone shows an unusual amount of interest in your children or gives them gifts. Ask your children why they are acting that way.
- Attend your children's activities so you can observe how other adults who are involved interact with them. Talk to the person in charge if you become concerned about anyone's behavior.
- Make time every day to discuss the day's events with your children. Encourage them to tell you about anything unusual or suspicious that bothers them, anything that makes them uncomfortable, or scares or confuses them, or if anyone has approached or touched them. Tell them to trust their instincts in these situations. If something doesn't seem right, it probably isn't. They have the right to say "NO" if they sense something is wrong.
- Be alert for any changes in your children's behavior. Look and listen for things that indicate something is troubling them. Children are often uncomfortable in disclosing disturbing events or feelings because they are concerned about your reactions to their problems. When they do talk about their problems be calm, compassionate, reassuring, and nonjudgmental as you work with them to resolve the problem.
- Listen to what they say and never underestimate their fears or concerns. Show them that you are always concerned about their safety and security. Effective communication is the most important factor in child safety.
- Discuss the safety and security tips in this paper with your children in an open, calm, reassuring manner so as not to frighten them.
- Take advantage of situations that arise when you are out with your children to point out dangers and teach safety skills. Practice safety in "what-if" scenarios. Make sure your children understand what to look for and what to do in these real-life situations.
- Report any suspicious persons or activities involving your children to the SDPD on its non-emergency number, **(619) 531-2000** or **(858) 484-3154**.

## **SITUATIONAL SAFETY MEASURES**

These are things you should do in various situations, and what you should teach your children to do and not do when they are on their own. Many apply in more than one situation.

## **Making 911 Calls**

- Never say "nine eleven." There is no eleven on a telephone keypad or dial. Always say "nine-one-one."
- Call **911** if you think there is an emergency. Emergencies are incidents that are in progress or about to happen in which can result in serious personal injury, property damage, or property loss. They include crimes, fires, vehicle collisions, gas leaks, and situations in which a person is badly hurt, very sick, choking, drowning, etc. Make sure your child understands what an emergency is.
- Never call **911** as a prank or joke. They can get into trouble and keep someone who really needs help from getting it in time.
- If you call **911** by mistake, don't hang up. Explain the mistake to the dispatcher, the person who answers, and say there is no emergency.
- Always call from a safe place. If there is a fire in the house, get out first and then call.
- Give the dispatcher your name, phone number, location, and a good description of the emergency.
- Post your address near the phone so they can give it to the dispatcher when they call.
- Post phone numbers to call to report other incidents. For example, **911** is not for animal emergencies. Call your vet or the County Department of Animal Control at **(619) 236-2341**.

## **In Day or Home Care**

- Say "NO" when anyone asks you to do something painful, embarrassing, or wrong. Don't be tempted by gifts or candy, or be compelled by threats.
- Don't allow anyone to touch the parts of your body covered by your bathing suit. And don't touch anyone else's body in those places.
- Don't remain alone with an adult in a bathroom, office, bedroom, closet, or other isolated place.
- When in a bathroom, do not allow anyone to watch you or fix your clothes. And never touch bodily wastes or blood.

## **In a New Neighborhood**

Before you let your children go out on their own you should:

- Meet your neighbors and introduce your children to them.
- Take your children on a walking tour of the neighborhood.
- Show them safe places to go if they need help, e.g., neighbor's or friend's homes, businesses, offices, etc.
- Show them places to avoid, e.g., deserted or abandoned buildings, dark or isolated areas, etc.
- Make a map of safe routes to the school, playground, stores, and other places where they would be allowed to go. Go over the map with them.

The do's and don'ts for being out in the neighborhood on their own are listed below under *Out and Away from Home*.

## **Going to and from School**

Before you let your children go to school on their own you should:

- Walk your children to and from a new school. Point out dangerous spots, escape routes, and safe places to go if they need help. Give them a map with safe routes, street names and landmarks.
- If your children take a bus to and from school, visit the bus stop with your children and make sure they know the bus number. Have your children stay with a group while waiting for the bus.
- Ask the school to notify you whenever one of your children is not in class. Make sure the school has up-to-date and accurate contact information for you.
- Tell the school not to release your children to anyone but yourself or a person previously designated by you. Have the school call you to verify any call saying another person will come to pick them up.

When your children go to school on their own they should:

- Go with a friend. Not walk, bike, or wait at a bus stop alone.
- Stay in well-lit areas. Avoid shortcuts, deserted or abandoned buildings, and dark or isolated areas. Be alert and aware of their surroundings.
- Observe all traffic rules.
- Turn around and run to the nearest safe place if a person appears to be following on foot, or a vehicle slows or stops by them. Run away from danger, never toward it. Safe places would be neighbors' or friends' homes, businesses, offices, etc.
- Don't approach any vehicle unless you know the people in it.
- Not hitchhike or accept a ride from anyone unless you have told them it is OK in each instance. Tell them to say "NO" and run to a safe place if offered a ride by a stranger.
- Never leave school with anyone they don't know. Establish a simple code word to be used if someone your children don't know comes to pick them up. Remind them about the word periodically and tell them not to accept a ride or go anywhere with anyone who does not know the code word. Stress that this word must be kept secret.

### **Out and Away from Home**

First teach your children the difference between a stranger who may be a danger and one who may be helpful, e.g., in an emergency rescue situation. The latter include uniformed law enforcement officers, uniformed security guards, and business, store, and school personnel wearing name tags. It is OK to give out personal information such as name, address, and phone number to these people. The simple "stranger-danger" message is inappropriate and misguided because the danger to children is much greater from someone who is not a stranger. Furthermore, the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC) says that children don't get it. They will often describe a stranger as someone who is ugly or mean. They do not perceive attractive or friendly persons, or persons they see more than once as strangers. Children need to learn how to recognize and avoid potentially dangerous situations.

Other things they should be taught are:

- Tell you where they are going and who they are going with.
- Not wander off from where they say they will be.
- Play with others, not alone.
- Say "NO" to any unwelcome, uncomfortable, or confusing touching or actions by others and to get out of these situations as fast as possible. If avoidance is not possible tell them to make a big scene by screaming, yelling, kicking, and resisting. Their safety is more important than being polite.
- Not to get in a vehicle or go anywhere with a person without your permission.
- Not to respond just because a person tries to start a conversation.
- Stay away from any adult who asks for help, e.g., "Can you help me find my dog?" or asks for directions (an adult should ask another adult, not a child for help), or tries to get you to go somewhere with them, e.g., "Your mom's hurt and she told me to come get you."
- How to use a pay phone to call **911** in an emergency. Be sure to say you don't need to put in any money.
- Not to let anyone take their picture. Tell you if someone asks.
- Not to accept gifts or money from strangers. Have them tell you if anyone offers gifts or money. Be alert for any new things they acquire.
- Not to be out alone at night.
- Not to go into anyone else's home without permission.
- If they get lost, remain where they first became lost and wait for a rescue unless that place becomes dangerous because of weather or another reason. In that case go to the nearest safe place. Make noise by yelling, blowing a whistle, or some other means of attracting attention. This may help bring someone to their rescue.

## Returning Home Alone

- Carry their house keys in a secure hidden place. Leave an extra key with a neighbor or trusted friend and tell your child where it will be if it's needed.
- Don't go in or call out if a window or screen is broken, a door is ajar, a strange vehicle is parked in the driveway, or the burglar alarm is going off. Go to a neighbor's home or use your cell phone to call **911**. Then call you and wait for the police to arrive. Enter when they say it is safe to do so.
- Turn off the burglar alarm.
- Lock the door immediately after entering and make sure the home is secure.
- Check in with you after arriving home to let you know that they have arrived safely.

## At Home Alone

Before leaving your children alone at home make sure they are not afraid to be alone and are able to follow your instructions about dealing with various situations that might arise. Here are some other things you should do:

- Make sure your home is secure with deadbolt locks on outside doors, locked side-yard gates, secondary locks on sliding glass doors and windows, burglar and smoke alarms, etc. Additional tips on controlling access, providing visibility, and maintaining a safe home can be found by clicking on *Home Security* on the Prevention Tips page of the SDPD website at [www.sandiego.gov/police/services/prevention/tips](http://www.sandiego.gov/police/services/prevention/tips).
- Have a first-aid kit available and teach your children basic first aid.
- Post a list of important phone numbers near the phone. Include the numbers of your cell and work phones, and those of neighbors and trusted friends and family members to call for help in an emergency. Also include the numbers of your family doctor, vet, et al.
- Provide written instructions for using the appliances.
- Provide instructions for doing chores, homework, watching TV, playing games, using the computer, etc.
- Install a peephole in the front door and Caller ID on your home phone so your children can see who's at the door or calling on the phone.
- Provide a list of people who can visit.
- Provide a list of people whose calls you can answer.

Then teach them the following:

- Use the peephole to see who's at the door when someone knocks or rings the bell. If you don't recognize the person as being on the approved visit list say something like "MY MOMMY CAN'T COME TO THE DOOR NOW" and don't open the door. In this situation it's important to let the person there know someone is home. A burglar casing homes might try to break in if he or she thinks no one is at home.
- Use Caller ID to see who's calling. Answer the phone if the number is on the approved list. Don't answer the phone otherwise.
- If you don't use Caller ID and answer the phone, take a message and say I'll call back. Don't say I'm not at home or that you are home alone. If you can't take a message, don't answer the phone.
- Keep all doors and windows locked and how to unlock them in an emergency.
- Who to call and what to do after calling **911** in an emergency, and what constitutes an emergency, e.g., a fire, gas leak, smoke, etc.
- Who to call and what to do in a non-emergency, and how they differ from emergencies.
- How to use all the safety and security features of the home, including smoke and burglar alarms, panic buttons, fire extinguishers, outside lights, etc.
- How to get out quickly in case of fire.
- What to do if they smell smoke or gas.
- What to do during an electrical storm and a power outage.
- When to leave the house.
- When to invite a friend or friends over.
- When to use the phone.

## **Babysitting**

- Know your employer. Only work for people you or your parents know, or for whom you have a good personal reference.
- Give us your employer's name, address, phone number, and where he or she is going and when he or she expects to be home.
- Have your employer show you all the safety and security features of the home, including smoke and burglar alarms, telephones, panic buttons, fire extinguishers, door and window locks, outside lights, etc.
- Keep all doors and windows locked while inside. Leave an outside light on after dark. Keep drapes or blinds closed at night but leave some lights on.
- Keep front door locked if you are out in the back yard or in a common play area.
- Follow the same security principles you use at home in answering the door or the phone.
- Don't say you are alone and babysitting when answering the door or phone. Say you are visiting and that you will take a message for the parents.
- Hold hands with the children when walking. When walking along a street, keep between the children and the street.

## **In Stores and Other Public Places**

- Have your children stay with you at all times. Tell them not to wander off, leave the store or place, or hide. Don't get distracted by the sights, sounds, and crowds when shopping during holidays or visiting an amusement of theme park.
- Accompany younger children to restrooms.
- Never leave your children at a video arcade, movie theater, food court, toy store, or mall play area as a convenient "babysitter" while you are shopping. Personnel in those areas are not there to watch children.
- If you allow an older child to go off without you, have him or her go with a friend and set a time for them to return or meet you at a designated place. Also, agree on what to do if plans change.
- Tell them to go to the nearest uniformed security guard, salesperson with a nametag, or Help/Information Desk or Visitor Center and ask for help if they become lost. Show these people to your children when you enter the store or place.
- Report a missing child immediately if you get separated. Carry a recent color photo and describe the clothes he or she is wearing. Contact security at the store or place first, and then call **911** if the child is not found soon.

## **At an Amusement or Theme Park**

The following apply when your children visit an amusement or theme park on a field trip with a school or other youth group. But first make sure there will be qualified supervision of your children by trusted adults. Then get detailed information about the park and go over it with your children before they visit. Get a map and show your children where the Visitor Center is located. Have your children do the following:

- Stay with their group. Go to the Visitor Center and remain there if they get separated and have a uniformed security guard or park employee wearing a name tag contact their group leader. Tell them not to talk to or accept help from anyone else, or become isolated with anyone, even characters in costume.
- Tell their group leader immediately if anyone approaches them, engages in any suspicious or inappropriate behavior, or makes them feel sad, scared, or confused.
- Yell loudly if anyone tries to touch or grab them. They could yell "HELP, THIS PERSON IS TRYING TO TAKE ME."
- Don't go on a ride to a restroom alone. Take a friend with you.

## **Trick-or-Treating on Halloween**

These tips will help your children have a safe and enjoyable Halloween. Do the following before they go out:

- Have your children wear light- or bright-colored clothing so they can easily be seen at night. Add reflective tape to any dark costumes.

- Make sure their costumes fit well. Oversized costumes and footwear can cause them to trip and fall.
- Make sure hats can't slide over their eyes, and if they wear masks, that they fit securely and have eye holes that are large enough for full vision.
- Apply only nontoxic and hypoallergenic paint or cosmetics if they wear face make-up.
- Don't let them wear costumes with excessive fabric. Loose clothing can brush up against a jack-o-lantern or other open flame and cause costumes to catch on fire.
- If they carry props such as swords or knives, have them carry flexible ones. Inflexible ones can cause serious injury if they fall on them.
- Feed your children a snack or light meal before trick-or-treating so they won't get hungry and sample some treats they collect.
- Don't let them wear decorative contact lenses bought from Halloween or novelty shops, salons, beauty supply stores, or online sites that don't require a prescription. Those who buy counterfeit lenses that are manufactured and sold illegally can experience infections, corneal ulcers, and even blindness. If they want to use decorative contact lenses, have them get an eye exam from a licensed eye doctor and then a valid prescription that includes the brand name, lens measurements and an expiration date.

Younger children should be accompanied by an adult. Attach a tag with their name, address, and phone number to their clothes in case they get separated. It is better if they trick-or-treat during daylight.

Older children should trick-or-treat with friends. It is more fun and safer. They should carry cell phones and flashlights, have a curfew, tell you where they are going, go only to familiar nearby neighborhoods, only visit homes with porch lights on, and remain within view from the street. Remind them to do the following:

- Stay on sidewalks and otherwise walk facing traffic.
- Cross streets at intersections and look both ways before crossing.
- Walk with the signal if there is one.
- Don't enter a residence of someone you don't know.
- Not to eat any treats they collect, but to bring them home for you to examine.

After they get home:

- Examine all the candy they bring home before they eat them. Look for holes, punctures, or other tampering, etc. Throw away any treats that are homemade, unwrapped, or not properly sealed. Also throw away any fruit that was given to your child.
- Look for candies that are infused with marijuana. Some treats that look like regular chocolate bars, brownies, or jelly candies may contain Tetrahydrocannabinol (THC), the active ingredient in marijuana. It can make your child sick. If your child starts acting strange or feels ill after eating candy, take him or her to the nearest emergency room.
- If any candy looks suspicious and might contain marijuana or some other poison, call the SDPD on its non-emergency number **(619) 531-2000** or **(858) 484-3154**. An officer will come collect the candy and ask where your child might have gotten it.
- If your child has food allergies, read all labels giving them any treats to eat.

### **Living at School or Elsewhere Away from Home**

- Leave valuables and other things that can't be replaced at home.
- Take an inventory of all the things taken. Write down model and serial numbers of all electronics. Include pictures if appropriate.
- Keep a list of all things loaned to others.
- Don't leave laptops, smartphones, etc. unattended.
- Carry electronic devices in a backpack or bag that doesn't advertise what's inside.
- Install an anti-theft app on your device so you can track it down or remotely wipe it if it is lost or stolen.
- Keep all documents that contain financial and sensitive personal information, e.g., a Social Security Number (SSN), in a safe place such as a locked drawer or a safe deposit box. Better yet, cancel paper statements and get them electronically.

- Put strong passwords on your computer, smartphone, credit- and debit-card accounts, etc. Avoid using easily remembered numbers or available information like mother's maiden name, date of birth, phone number, or the last four digits of your SSN. Passwords should be more than eight characters in length and have at least one capital letter, one lowercase letter, one number, and one symbol. Use of non-dictionary words is also recommended. Install a password manager app on your device to store and organize passwords. It will store your passwords encrypted, requiring you to create a single strong password for access to your entire password database.
- Install apps from reputable app stores, especially for Windows and Android devices. And scan them with anti-virus software before installing them.
- Chain and lock your bike to a secure, immovable object when it's unattended. Use a high tensile-strength chain and a matching security lock. Loop the chain through the rear wheel or frame and make sure it is tight around your bike.
- Never leave anything of value in plain sight inside your vehicle. Remove or conceal all navigation aids, cell phones, audio systems, laptop computers, packages, sports equipment, cameras, purses, wallets, firearms, hand tools, sunglasses, etc.
- Consider obtaining renter's insurance if you are living off campus.

## USING THE INTERNET AND CELL PHONES

While the Internet provides a way to stay connected with friends, it also exposes us and our children to increased risks of cyberbullying, cyber predators, identity theft, fraud, and phishing. In June 2012 the U. S. Department of Homeland Security's *Stop.Think.Connect Update* cited a study conducted by the National Cyber Security Alliance that found that children aged 8 to 18 spend an average of about eight hours a day online. If a child sleeps eight hours a night, one-half of the time he or she is awake is spent online. In order to protect yourself and your family from potential online dangers, it is important first to understand the risks. Did you know that?

- 20 percent of kids will have been a victim of cyberbullying by the time they graduate from high school according to the Cyberbullying Research Center.
- 79 percent of online teens agree that teens aren't careful enough when sharing personal information online according to a study by the Pew Internet and American Life Project.
- The Crimes against Children Research Center warns that one in five U.S. teenagers who regularly log on to the Internet say they have received an unwanted sexual solicitation via the web.
- 500,000 kid identities are stolen each year according to the Identity Theft Resource Center. In a MSNBC investigation officials found a 9-year-old girl in default on utility bills, a teenager \$750,000 in debt, and a 2-year-old with a pile of credit card bills.

Although the vast majority of online services and Internet material is legitimate and benign, there have been numerous incidents of children receiving pornographic material, providing personal information under the pretext of possibly winning a prize, or sending money for promised benefits or products. Warning signs of these dangers include the following:

- Excessive late-night computer use
- Secretive behavior about computer associates
- Pornography
- Receiving phone calls, mail, gifts, or packages from persons you don't know
- Making phone calls to numbers you don't recognize
- Hidden files or directories, and password-protected bios, files, or logical drives
- Turning the computer monitor off or quickly changing the screen when you enter the room
- Becoming withdrawn from the family

If you are not familiar with computers, the Internet, and social networking you should visit **www.NetSmartz411.org**. It is parents' and guardians' premier online resource for answering questions about Internet safety, computers, and the Web. There you can get answers to frequently asked questions. Or you can call **(888) 638-7411** to ask your questions to an expert. You can also visit the NetSmartz Workshop at

**www.netsmartz.org.** It is an interactive, educational program of the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children (NCMEC) that provides age-appropriate resources to help teach children how to be safer on- and off- line. The program is designed for parents, guardians, and children ages 5-17. It entertains while it educates with resources such as videos, games, activity cards, and presentations, and has the following goals:

- Educate children on how to recognize potential Internet risks
- Engage children and adults in a two-way conversation about on- and off-line risks
- Empower children to help prevent themselves from being exploited and to report victimization to a trusted adult

### **Minimizing Internet Dangers**

You should do the following to minimize Internet dangers that your children may encounter:

- Start early. Talk to your children about online behavior, safety, and security as soon as they start using a computer, cell phone, or any mobile device. Have them show you the websites they visit, how they navigate through the Internet, and how they use social networking sites. To better understand the latter you should try networking yourself. This is a great way to connect with your children on computer-related matters.
- Help them find information online. Search together to find reliable source of information and learn to distinguish fact from fiction.
- Set reasonable guidelines and time limits for Internet and cell phone use, and social networking. Prohibiting Internet use is not a good idea because it is too easy for children to establish accounts at a friend's house or many other places. But do set time limits on computer use. People, not computers, should be their best friends and companions.
- Keep the computer in the family room or other area where its use can be monitored. Don't allow computers and mobile devices such as laptops and smart phones to be used in your children's bedrooms. And don't allow your children to have separate passwords and log-on names.
- Post clear, simple, easy-to-read rules for Internet use on or near the computer. Discuss these rules with your children and make sure they understand the reasons for them. Visit **www.NetSmartz.org** for examples of rules and safety tips. Your supervision and attention is the best way to protect your children when using the Internet.
- Know what Internet access your children have away from home, i.e., at a friend's home, libraries, schools, and cell phones and other wireless devices. Also have a plan to monitor their online activities there.
- Initiate conversations with your children about their Internet use. Communicate your values, be patient and persistent, and don't rush through conversations. Encourage your children to come to you with any problems they encounter online or anything that makes them uncomfortable.
- Your children are computer users and should have their own passwords and log-on names. Make sure they understand the importance of password and privacy protection, and not to share passwords or log-on names with anyone but you. Passwords should be more than eight characters in length and have at least one capital letter, one lowercase letter, one number, and one symbol. Use of non-dictionary words is also recommended. Easily remembered numbers or available information like mother's maiden name, date of birth, phone number, or pet's names should not be used.
- Have your children give you their passwords and log-on names, and share their blogs and online profiles with you. Be aware that they can have multiple accounts on multiple services. Search for you children's identifying information and monitor their screen name(s) and websites for inappropriate content.
- Have your children request your permission to exchange phone numbers or meet another child they have "talked" to online. Consider talking to the other child's parents about a meeting and accompanying your child to the meeting, which should be in a public place. Tell your children that caution is needed because people online are not necessarily who they might seem to be. Never allow them to meet someone they have "met" online without your permission.
- Discourage your children from visiting chat rooms, especially those with video, even if they claim to be child friendly. Persons who would harm children use these websites to entice children.
- Use filtering software to scan for offensive words and phrases in chat rooms and then end the conversations by signing off.
- Install a browser that limits the websites that your younger children can visit to those vetted by educational professionals. Some will send you periodic e-mails that detail you children's Internet activity.

- Install a monitoring service like McGruff SafeGuard. It's free for 30 days and also scans any chat or text conversations for bad language and other inappropriate communications. Go to [www.gomcgruff.com](http://www.gomcgruff.com) for details of this service. Also look at the ESET Family Security Pack at [www.eset.com](http://www.eset.com).
- Have your children promise not to turn off any programs you might install to monitor their computer use.
- Understand how online services work.
- Supervise closely the choice of websites by young children. Monitor their online activities as they get older and more independent. Check the computer's cache and history to see what websites they have accessed. Also check their profiles and buddy lists.
- Learn the meaning of the acronyms your children use in texting. Go to [www.netlingo.com/acronyms.php](http://www.netlingo.com/acronyms.php) for a list of acronyms and their definitions, e.g., PAL means parents are listening.
- Make sure your child's screen name does not reveal any identifying information such as name, age, location, school. A screen name should be benign and innocuous, e.g., the first letter of each word in an easily-remembered phrase.
- Prohibit your children from downloading any games, movies, programs, etc., trying to win "free" things, or buying things online. You are the computer administrator and should be the only one who can install new software and programs.
- Tell your children it's not safe to put photos or any type of personally identifying information on a personal website without privacy settings, even if they promise to give the website address to people they know. Anyone in the world can access such a website. Also, personally identifying information should not be published on a group website or in an Internet yearbook. Group photos are preferable to individual photos only if no names are published.
- Children should be aware that file sharing programs for music and videos may be stealing copyrighted material and make their computers vulnerable to malware.

## **Dangers of Social Networking**

Children who use social networking sites like Facebook and Myspace should be warned about online predators. These Internet offenders manipulate young people into illegal or inappropriate behavior by "grooming" them, i.e., building trust, appealing to their desire to be liked and understood, and playing on their natural curiosity about sex. All settings should be on "private." Visit social-networking websites with your children and show them what's OK and what's risky. Establish your own profile so you can monitor your children. Teach them to do the following to prevent and deal with any problems that might arise:

- Never to give out their name, address, phone number, photos, school, schedule, or any other personal information that can identify them. Avoid posting anything that would enable a stranger to find them, e.g., school names. Members' profiles become public information.
- Never say they are home alone.
- Don't post anything that they wouldn't want the world to know, especially anything or language that might embarrass them later, e.g., in applying for college or a job. What's uploaded can be downloaded and passed around by others and be posted online forever. It can't be taken back even if it's deleted from a site.
- Never send out any pictures of themselves, family members, or friends.
- Don't "friend" strangers. People aren't always who they say they are. Have your children ask permission before listing any adults as "friends," even if they are teachers, relatives, or your friends.
- Come to you to discuss any harassment, hate speech, and inappropriate content they receive.
- Check comments regularly. Ignore and don't respond to any that are mean or embarrassing. Just log off if the harassment bothers them.
- Avoid misleading people into thinking they are older or younger than they are.
- Don't talk about sex or use any sexually explicit language.
- Block people from sending messages or e-mail, or delete them from their "buddy list" if they harass you.
- Change their password if someone hacks into their profile. Change username and e-mail address if someone repeatedly bothers them.
- Have you contact the company that runs the site to have their profile deleted if it was created or altered without their knowledge.

- Talk to you if they are upset about what is being said about them. If they are scared or threatened you will contact a Juvenile Service Team officer at the nearest SDPD area station and inform their Internet Service Provider. Area station addresses and phone numbers are listed in the back of this paper.

Children also need to be given rules for using cell phones and be warned of dangers in their use. Rules should deal with when and where phones can be used, what they can and cannot be used for, and etiquette and safety in texting. You need to set good examples in the use of phones, e.g., not while driving. The following are some good rules for texting.

- Be polite and respect others. Avoid using shorthand that might lead to misunderstandings. Think about how a message might be read and understood before sending it.
- Ignore messages from people you don't know.
- Block numbers of people you don't want to hear from.
- Don't post your cell phone number on the Internet.
- Never provide personal or financial information in response to a text message.
- Use Cc: and Reply all: with care.
- Never engage in sexting, i.e., the sending or forwarding of sexually explicit photos, videos, or messages. In addition to risking their reputation, friendships, and employment and educational opportunities, they could be in violation of California Penal Code Secs. 288.2, 288.3, and 311 *et seq* if they create, forward, or even save this kind of message.

Once rules are set you need to remind your children about them and check to see that they are being followed. Here are some things to do:

- Discuss to consequences of breaking the rules.
- Review your child's "friends" list and delete any you don't know about.
- Review their text messages and block or set limits on text messaging and picture sending if you don't like what you see. Make sure they are not receiving any threatening or harassing messages, or are sending, receiving, or saving any sexts.
- Block unwanted callers.
- Check the browser history. If it's empty someone may be hiding something.

## Cyberbullying

Cyberbullying is another problem you should talk to your children about. You should tell them that they can't hide behind the messages they send or pictures they post, and that hurtful messages not only threaten the victim, but they make the sender look bad and can bring scorn from peers. They should not make threats, spread lies, start rumors, distribute embarrassing pictures, or otherwise distribute or publish electronic messages of a harassing nature about another person with the intent to place that person in reasonable fear for his or her safety. Such messages are a misdemeanor under California Penal Code Sec. 653.2, and a person who sends them can be punished by up to one year in a county jail, by a fine of not more than \$1,000, or both. Also, you should also make sure your own conduct does not encourage bullying, i.e., that you don't make mean-spirited comments about others or act unkindly to them.

You also need to be prepared to help your children if they become a victim of cyberbullying. You should encourage them to show you any online messages or pictures that make them feel threatened or hurt. If you fear for your child's safety you should call the SDPD on its non-emergency number, **(619) 531-2000** or **(858) 484-3154**. Otherwise tell your child not to respond, save the messages and pictures for evidence, and keep you informed. Call the SDPD again if the bullying persists. Here are some other things your child should do:

- Report the bullying to the website or network where it appears.
- Delete the bully from your list of "friends" or "buddies," or block the bully's username or e-mail address.
- Share these measures with a friend who is a victim of bullying. Bullying usually stops quickly when peers intervene on behalf of the victim.

## Reporting Attempted Sexual Exploitation

Any suspected online sexual exploitation or attempt by an adult to meet your child should be reported immediately to the San Diego Internet Crimes against Children Task Force at **(858) 715-7100** and the Cyber Tipline at **www.cybertipline.com** or **(800) 843-5678**. The former is the local law-enforcement agency that deals with these matters. The latter is managed by the NCMEC and is mandated by Congress to forward your information to the appropriate law enforcement agency for investigation. If your children or anyone in your home receives pornography depicting children or your children receive sexually explicit images, report the imagery to ICAC and keep it open on your computer until an investigator comes to see it. Do not copy or download it. In the meantime you can use your computer for other things or turn your monitor off.

## Preventing Cyber Crimes

Children should also be warned about virus creators, identity thieves, and spammers. These cyber-criminals are increasingly targeting users of social networking sites in an effort to steal their personal data and the passwords to their accounts. One of the tactics they use to gain access to this information involves sending social networking users e-mails that appear to come from online “friends.” For example, some Facebook users have been receiving e-mails from “friends” that claim to contain a video of them. When they click on it they download a virus that goes through their hard drives and installs malware (malicious software). The virus, known as Koobface, then sends itself to all the “friends” on the victim's Facebook profile. A new version of the virus also is affecting users of Myspace and other social networking sites. Cyber-criminals are tricking social networking users into downloading malware by creating fake profiles of friends, celebrities, and others. Security experts say that such attacks, which became widespread in 2008, are increasingly successful because more and more people are becoming comfortable with putting all kinds of personal information about themselves on social networking sites. They warn that users need to be very careful about what information they post because it can be used to steal their identities.

To avoid these problems on social networking sites or anywhere in the Internet, you should warn your children to:

- Not to open any e-mail from an unknown sender. Delete it without opening it. “Drive-by spam” can automatically download malware when an HTML e-mail is opened. You don't have to click on a link or open an attachment to get infected.
- Not to click on any links, videos, programs, etc. provided in messages, even if a “friend” encourages you to click on them.
- Not to visit any sites that promise ways of bypassing parental controls or blocks set up by schools to prevent users from visiting sites such as Facebook. These sites are full of scams, malware, and offers for other services.
- Get program updates directly from the company's website, not through a provided link.
- Customize your personal privacy settings so only your “friends” have access to the information you post.
- Read your network's privacy policy regularly to stay informed on how it uses or discloses your information.
- Scan your computer regularly with an anti-virus program. Make sure the program is kept up to date, preferably automatically.
- Be suspicious of anyone, even a “friend,” who asks for money over the Internet.
- Don't open or forward chain letters. Just delete them. They are nuisances at best and scams at worst. And many contain viruses or spyware.
- Watch out for “free” stuff. Don't download anything unless it's from a trusted source and it's been scanned with security software. “Free” stuff can hide malware.
- Do not buy or download free anti-spyware software in response to unexpected pop-ups or e-mails, especially ones that claim to have scanned your computer and detected malicious software.
- Make sure the pop-up blocker in the tools menu of your browser is turned on. This will prevent most pop-up ads. If you do get one, be careful in getting rid of it. Never click on any of its boxes. By clicking on No or Close you may actually be downloading malware onto your computer. And even clicking on the X in the upper right-hand corner can initiate a download instead of closing the ad. To be safe on a PC, hold down the Ctrl and Alt keys and hit Delete. Then in the Windows Security box click on Task Manager, and then click on End Task. This will clear your screen. Then run a full anti-virus scan.
- Avoid all online games and quizzes that request personal information, including your e-mail address. Providing this information can put your identity at risk.

## Additional Information

Additional information on Internet dangers to children and how to keep children safe online is available on numerous websites. These include the following:

- San Diego Internet Crimes Against Children Task Force at [www.sdicac.org](http://www.sdicac.org)
- National Cyber Security Alliance at [www.staysafeonline.org](http://www.staysafeonline.org)
- San Diego County District Attorney at [www.sdcca.org](http://www.sdcca.org). See the Protecting Children Online page under Protecting the Community.
- GetNetWise at [www.GetNetWise.org](http://www.GetNetWise.org)
- Federal Bureau of Investigation at [www.fbi.gov](http://www.fbi.gov). See *A Parent's Guide to Internet Safety* under STATS & SERVICES, Reports & Publications, and On Cyber Issues.
- NCMEC at [www.ncmec.org](http://www.ncmec.org). See resources for parents and guardians.
- NET CETERA: Chatting with Kids about Being Online at [www.onguardonline.gov](http://www.onguardonline.gov).
- *Living Life Online* at [www.ftc.gov/bcp/edu/microsites/livinglifeonline/index.shtm](http://www.ftc.gov/bcp/edu/microsites/livinglifeonline/index.shtm).
- ConnectSafely at [www.connectsafely.org/](http://www.connectsafely.org/) offers parent's guides, a collection of short, clearly written guidebooks that explain apps, services, and platforms popular with teens.
- Netsmartz Kids at [www.netsmartzkids.org/](http://www.netsmartzkids.org/) provides interactive, educational, and age-appropriate resources to help teach children how to be safer online.
- Family Online Safety Institute at [www.fosi.org/good-digital-parenting/](http://www.fosi.org/good-digital-parenting/) gives advice, tips, and tools that empower parents to confidently navigate the online world with your kids.
- Savvy Cyber Kids at [www.savvycyberkids.org/default.aspx](http://www.savvycyberkids.org/default.aspx) offers curriculum that covers the concepts of security, privacy, bully response, and online ethics with engaging characters and in age appropriate language.
- Stop.Think.Connect Social Media Guide at [www.stcguide.com/explore/tips-trends](http://www.stcguide.com/explore/tips-trends) provides tips for parents and students on how to protect themselves on social media and includes many resources available to them. The Guide explains the cyber risks kids face when using social media and provides tips for talking to your kids about these risks.

## BULLYING

Bullying is a form of violence. It involves a real or perceived imbalance of power, with the more powerful child or group attacking those who are less powerful. Bullying may be physical (hitting, kicking, spitting, or stabbing), verbal (taunting, malicious teasing, name calling, or threatening), or emotional (spreading rumors, manipulating social relationships, extorting, or intimidating). Bullying can occur face-to-face or by an electronic communication device. When by the latter it is called cyberbullying, as discussed above under Using the Internet and Cell Phones.

Most children have been teased by a sibling or a friend at some time. Teasing is usually not harmful when done in a playful, friendly way, and the children involved find it funny. But when teasing becomes hurtful, unkind, and constant, it crosses the line into bullying. If your child is being bullied, you want to get it stopped. But first you have to know about it. Unless your child tells you about it or has visible bruises or injuries, it can be difficult to figure out if it's happening. But there are some warning signs. You might notice your child acting differently or seeming anxious, not eating or sleeping well, not doing the things he or she usually enjoys, or being afraid to go to school. If you suspect bullying, try to get your child to talk about it. Tell him or her that it's nothing to be embarrassed and ashamed about, it's not your fault, and it's important to talk about it so it can be dealt with and stopped. Praise your child for doing the right thing by talking to you about it. Tell your child that he or she isn't alone and that a lot of people get bullied at some time. Emphasize that it's the bully who is behaving badly and that together we will figure out what to do about it.

Until the bullying can be stopped you should tell your child to avoid the bully and if that's not possible, to be with someone else when the bully is around. If confronted by the bully, tell your child to act calm and confident, ignore hurtful remarks, tell the bully to stop, walk away, and go somewhere safe where the bully won't follow. Advise your child not to respond to bullying by fighting or bullying back because the situation can quickly escalate into violence, serious trouble, and someone getting injured. By ignoring the bully and showing you don't care the bully will probably get bored and stop trying to bother you.

If the bullying occurs at school, the incident should be reported immediately to a teacher or counselor. This can be done by you or your child. All public schools in California are required to have policies and procedures for preventing bullying. They will be in their comprehensive safety plans that all schools are mandated to have. When the bullying occurs because of the victim's actual or perceived disability, gender, nationality, race or ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, or association with a person or group with one or more of these actual or perceived characteristics, it becomes a hate crime as defined in California Penal Code Sec. 422.55 and the complaint process for dealing with it is defined in California Education Code Sec. 234.1 in the Safe Places to Learn Act. Depending on the nature of the incident, school personnel may talk to the alleged bully and his or her parents, recommend anti-bullying programs or disciplinary measures, report the incident to local law enforcement, advise professional counseling for the victim, etc. Reporting bullying is critical because bullies rarely stop on their own and their aggressive behavior will likely escalate and over time as they devise bolder ways to hurt people.

Bullying outside of schools should be reported by calling **911** if it is in progress or about to happen, or if it resulted in serious personal injury, property damage, or property loss. Otherwise it should be reported to the SDPD by calling **(619) 531-200** or **(858) 4843154**, its non-emergency numbers. In either case, be prepared to give the dispatcher the following: name of the bully, if known; nature of the bullying, i.e., hitting, taking money, threats, etc.; location, exact street address and nearest cross street; time of occurrence; and weapons used, if any. If the bully is not known, provide race, gender, age, height, weight, weapon type, hair (color, length, style, facial), clothing color and type (hat, tie, coat, shirt, trousers), other characteristics (e.g., tattoos, scars/marks, complexion, missing teeth, scars, glasses), etc.

Parents also have a duty to prevent their children from becoming bullies. They are their children's first teachers. Their words and actions at home will be imitated by their children in other settings. They should speak and act respectfully to all people. With regard to bullying they should tell their children the following:

- Bullying is disrespectful and can be dangerous even if perpetuated in the spirit of team building or as the price to pay for joining a group. Hazing is humiliating at the least and life threatening at the worst. It is also illegal.
- Bullying of a sexual nature constitutes sexual harassment and is also illegal.
- Bullying that occurs because of the victim's actual or perceived disability, gender, nationality, race or ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, or association with a person or group with one or more of these actual or perceived characteristics is a hate crime and cannot be dismissed as teasing.
- Bullying behavior that continues into adulthood can escalate to violent behavior toward strangers, friends, and even family. A lifetime of consequences may follow.

Parents should also tell their children that standing-by while someone is being bullied makes them a part of the problem. If the bullying occurs at school, they should walk away and report the incident to a teacher or counselor.

Parents and students can call Crime Stoppers at **(888) 580-8477** to provide anonymous tips about safety concerns and potential problems at their schools. And students in the San Diego Unified School District can receive cash rewards of up to \$1000 for tips or information that solve or prevent campus violence or vandalism to school property.

## **HOME VIDEO GAMES**

Children are spending increasing amounts of time playing video games, which include computer and console games. Games can have good and bad impacts. Children can learn useful information, skills, attitudes, and behaviors from them. They find them highly motivating by virtue of their interactive nature. But games can also have negative effects on children's health and behavior. The former include obesity, seizures, tendonitis, nerve compression, and carpal tunnel syndrome. The latter come primarily from violent games that lead to increased physiological arousal and aggressive thoughts, feelings, and behavior.

You can protect your children from these negative effects by limiting the time they play games, reading reviews and checking the ratings of games they might buy, and becoming familiar with the games by playing them with your children. You can get information and ratings of games on the websites of the Entertainment Software Rating Board and Common Sense Media at **www.esrb.com** and **www.common sense media.org**, respectively.

## PROTECTING YOUR CHILD'S IDENTITY

A child's SSN can be used by identity thieves to apply for government benefits, open bank and credit card accounts, apply for a loan or utility service, or rent a place to live. At a forum on child-centric fraud sponsored by the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) in July 2011 it was estimated that more than 140,000 American children become victims of identity theft each year. And in 2012 one identity-theft protection company estimated that about 11 percent of children five years of age or under have had their identities stolen. Thieves obtain children's SSNs by various means and sell these genuine numbers to persons with poor credit ratings who obtain credit cards, make extensive purchases, and don't pay their bills. Several signs can tip you off to the fact that someone is misusing your child's personal information and committing fraud. For example, you or your child might:

- Be turned down for government benefits because the benefits are being paid to another account using your child's SSN
- Get a notice from the IRS saying the child didn't pay income taxes, or that the child's SSN was used on another tax return
- Get collection calls or bills for products or services that you or your child didn't order
- Be denied credit for an unpaid debt

The following tips will help you protect your child's identity and prevent fraudulent use of his or her SSN.

- Protect your child's SSN as you would your own. Encrypt all files on your devices that contain it. Protect your devices with a firewall and anti-virus software. Carry your child's SSN in your purse or wallet only when you know you will need it.
- Provide your child's SSN only when it is required by a government agency or financial institution. Never provide it for identification.
- Teach your child never to give out personal information over the phone or on the Internet.
- Watch your child's mail for credit card applications, bills, or bank statements. They are signs that someone has started a credit history in your child's name.
- Check periodically to see if your child has a credit report. There should not be one unless someone has applied for credit using your child's SSN. No minor should have a credit report. If your child does have one, contact the credit card companies and the CCRBs immediately and ask each one to remove all accounts, account inquiries, and collection notices from any file associated with your child's name and SSN. (Their phone numbers are: **(800) 525-6285** for Equifax, **(888) 397-3742** for Experian, and **(800) 680-7289** for TransUnion.) You should also contact every business where your child's information was misused and ask each one to close the fraudulent account and flag it to show that it resulted from identity theft. Tell the businesses that issued credit that the accounts are in the name of your minor child, who by law isn't permitted to enter into contracts.
- Request that banks in which your child has an account remove his or her name from marketing lists.
- Take advantage of your rights under the Children's Online Privacy Protection Act (COPPA). This Federal law and the FTC mandates under it require websites and mobile apps to get parental consent before collecting and sharing information from children under 13 years old. This includes photos, videos, geolocation, and tracking tools such as cookies that use Internet Protocol addresses and mobile device IDs to follow a child's web activities across multiple apps and sites. COPPA covers sites and apps designed for children under 13 and general-audience sites and apps that know certain users are under 13. It protects information that sites and apps collect upfront and information that children give out or post later. It also requires these sites and apps to post a privacy policy that provides details about the kind of information they will collect and what they might do with the information. You should: (1) know your rights, (2) be careful with your permission, (3) check out the sites your children visit and apps they use, (4) review the sites' and apps' privacy policies, (5) contact the site of app if you have any questions about its privacy policy, and report any site or app that breaks the rules to the FTC at **[www.ftc.gov/complaint](http://www.ftc.gov/complaint)**. For answers to frequently asked questions about the Children's Online Privacy Protection Rule go to **[www.ftc.gov/privacy/coppafaqs.shtm](http://www.ftc.gov/privacy/coppafaqs.shtm)**.
- Also take advantage of your rights under the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), which is a Federal law that protects the privacy of student education records. It applies to all schools that receive funds under an applicable program of the U.S. Department of Education. It gives parents certain rights with respect to their children's education records. These rights transfer to the student when he or she reaches the age of 18 or attends a school beyond the high school level. Students to whom the rights have transferred are "eligible students." With certain exceptions, schools must have written permission from the parent or eligible student in

order to release any information from a student's education record. However, schools may disclose without consent "directory" information such as a student's name, address, telephone number, date and place of birth, honors and awards, and dates of attendance. But schools must tell parents and eligible students about directory information and allow them a reasonable amount of time to request that the school not disclose directory information about them. Schools must notify parents and eligible students annually of their rights under FERPA. For additional information you can call the U.S. Department of Education's Information Resource Center at **(800) 872-5327**. You should also be concerned about how information about your child is used and shared by organizations that sponsor after-school activities.

You should also be concerned about protecting your children's profiles, which include their name, gender, birth date, parents' names, mailing address, e-mail address, etc. This information may be collected by makers of Internet-connected toys and not be protected very well from hacking. For example, in 2015 VTech announced that one of its databases had been hacked, exposing the names, ages, and genders of six million children who used the company's toys. To be safe, parents should not connect to the Internet any toys or other electronic device their children might use

## **SELECTING A CHILD CARE CENTER OR FAMILY CHILD CARE HOME**

The majority of child care centers, including preschools, and family child care homes in California must be licensed by the Community Care Licensing Division (CCLD) of the California Department of Social Services (CDSS) if they care for children from more than one family not related to the licensee. Child care programs that are exempt from licensing are those on public school sites, Federal property, or at a private elementary school that cares for more than 95 percent of its own children.

This licensing is designed to ensure that facilities provide a safe and healthy environment for children in day care. A licensed facility will meet the CCLD's standards for admission policies, daily practices and procedures, emergency plans, facility design and structure, indoor and outdoor space, equipment, nutrition, background clearances, staff qualifications, and adult-staff ratios. When visiting a facility you should ask to see its license and most recent inspection report. You can get information on past CCLD reports, visits, complaints, inspections, citations, fines, etc. by calling it at **(844) 538-8766**. And as of July 2015 you can get information on the numbers of visits, Type A and B complaints, inspections, and citations on the CDSS website at **<https://secure.dss.ca.gov/CareFacilitySearch>**. But if you want information about the substance of these numbers, you still have to call the CCLD at **(844) 538-8766**. Child care centers are inspected annually, while family child care homes are inspected prior to being licensed and every three years thereafter.

You can get assistance in finding quality care for your child from the YMCA Child Care Resource Service by calling **(800) 481-2151** and asking to speak to a child care consultant. Information on this and other services provided by the Service can be found on its website at **[www.ymcacrs.org](http://www.ymcacrs.org)**. Before making a final selection of a child care center or home you should visit several more than once and follow the 5 Steps to Quality Child Care under For Parents and Looking for Child Care on this website. They are Look, Listen, Count, Ask, and Be Informed.

A great deal of information for parents looking for child care is also available on the California Department of Social Services Child Care Licensing website at **[www.cclld.ca.gov/PG411.htm](http://www.cclld.ca.gov/PG411.htm)**. It will answer the following questions:

- What types of licensed child care are available?
- How can I find a child care facility for my child?
- How do I choose a day care that's right for my child?
- What should I consider when looking for child care?
- What should I look for if my child is an infant?
- What should the facility provide for my child?
- What should I look for in regard to basic health and safety practices?
- What should I discuss with the day care provider?
- What will the provider need from me in order to enroll my child?
- How can I ensure a positive child care experience?

- What rights do parents have?
- What should I do if I have a concern regarding a provider?
- How can I file a complaint against a facility?
- How can I get help with day care costs?
- Where can I find information on child health and safety?

## **SELECTING A NANNY OR BABYSITTER FOR HOME CHILD CARE**

Before entrusting your child to a nanny or babysitter you should have each candidate's references, work history, and criminal background checked. You can do this three ways: (1) check with TrustLine, (2) check the California Home Care Aide Registry, and (3) do it yourself. The first two are free. The third can be costly if you decide to hire a private investigator.

### **TrustLine**

TrustLine is a database of nannies and babysitters that have cleared criminal background checks in California. You can see if a child care candidate is registered with TrustLine by calling **(800) 822-8490** and providing the candidate's full name and driver license number. TrustLine is the only authorized screening program of in-home caregivers in the state with access to fingerprint records at the California Dept. of Justice and the FBI. It was created by the California Legislature in 1987 to give parents an important tool to use in selecting a caregiver for their children. It is administered by the California Department of Social Services and endorsed by the California Academy of Pediatrics. All child-care providers registered with TrustLine have submitted their fingerprints to the California Dept. of Justice and have no disqualifying criminal convictions in California. TrustLine also examines the California Child Abuse Central Index for substantiated child abuse reports and verifies the candidate's identification number with the California Department of Motor Vehicles or the Immigration Naturalization Service. Since 1999 candidates also received a clearance from an FBI criminal record check. All employment agencies are required to use TrustLine. Thus nannies and sitters obtained through an agency will either be registered or in process of being registered. If a candidate you are interviewing is not registered tell him or her to call TrustLine at **(800) 822-8490** or go to its website at **www.trustline.org** for information on how to register.

The TrustLine website also contains a set of tips on choosing a child-care provider. It lists questions to ask and things to do after selecting a good caregiver. The latter include the following:

- Set up clear job responsibilities.
- Continually assess how the arrangement is working.
- Drop in unannounced at random times to time to see how your child is doing.
- Leave emergency contact information.
- Call TrustLine periodically to make sure your caregiver is still registered. It is updated continually and caregivers who have committed a disqualifying crime subsequent to their clearance are removed.
- Ask your child how he or she is getting along with the caregiver.

### **California Home Care Aide Registry**

As of January 2016 the California Home Care Services Consumer Protection Act requires that Home Care Organizations (HCAOs) that provide a wide range of non-medical assistive services to adults and children be licensed and a public online Registry be created for Home Care Aides (HCAs) who have been fingerprinted and had their background checked. This law is intended to promote consumer protection for elderly and disabled individuals that have private aides to come into their homes and provide assistance with activities of daily living. It also applies to parents or guardians who hire private aides to come into their homes and assist their children with activities of daily living. The newly formed Home Care Services Bureau is overseeing the licensing and oversight of the HCAOs, the application process for the HCAs, and the maintenance of the Registry. The California Caregiver Background Check Bureau will oversee the criminal background checks.

The Registry is accessible at **www.bit.ly/HCreistry**. It enables you to check whether a candidate has completed the application and criminal background check process. For this you must have the HCA's first and last name at

the time of application and their PIN, which is a unique 10 digit number that is given to each HCA for the Registry. This number is created when HCAs complete their application.

When considering using a HCAO you should ask it the following questions.

- Are the HCAs you send employed by you or do you just operate as a broker for independent contractor HCAs? If the HCAO operates as a broker, the HCAs it sends would not be bonded and insured and it can't be held responsible for their actions.
- Are your HCAs bonded and insured? Ask to see a copy of the bond to make sure it's current and the amount of the bond is at least \$10,000.
- Are your HCAs in the Registry?
- Do you screen your HCAs for past elder or child abuse?
- Do you test your HCAs for alcohol and drug use?
- Are your HCAs tested for diseases such as TB? Have they passed the tests?
- Will the HCAs you send be able to speak, read, and write fluently in the child's language?
- Will there be a written service agreement? Review it carefully before signing it. Make sure it states what the HCA is expected to do and provides information on cancellation policies.
- Do you have a written policy against HCAs accepting loans, gifts, or any gratuities from an employer? If not, create one yourself and ask the HCA to sign it.
- Will you send a replacement if the HCA calls in sick or is otherwise unable to come on a given day?

The answers to all these questions should be "yes" before you consider using a HCAO to provide HCAs. Even then you shouldn't rely completely on the HCAO regarding the trustworthiness of a HCA. Conduct some checks on your own, e.g., with former employers, as you would in hiring privately. Here are some other questions you should ask.

- What training is provided to HCAs? How are they supervised?
- How long has the HCA worked for you?
- What are the names and phone numbers of a few former employers of the HCA being considered for employment?

Once a HCA has been placed in the home, notify the HCAO immediately if you have any concerns about the HCA's actions.

### **Hiring a Child Caregiver Privately**

In hiring a caregiver privately seek referrals from a trusted source first. If possible avoid using a "help wanted" ad. And do not respond to an ad by a person seeking employment as a caregiver. Interview all prospective caregivers. For your safety, do it in a public place, e.g., a coffee shop, not at your home. And don't give out your home address. Ask the candidate to do the following:

- Fill out an employment application that asks for personal information, education, employment history, applicable licenses and certificates, personal references, etc.
- Provide proof of citizenship or legal residency, a state-issued photo ID, and a Social Security card.
- Provide his or her driver license number and automobile insurance policy information if driving is involved.
- Register with TrustLine or the California Home Care Services Bureau.
- If the candidate already registered and refuses to apply, and you want to conduct a background investigation to verify personal information that is not a matter of public record, e.g., education, credit, and medical records, you should ask the candidate to sign an investigation authorization form. For the investigation you can hire a private investigator or do it yourself. You can find an investigator in San Diego on the California Association of Licensed Investigators' website at [www.cali-pi.org](http://www.cali-pi.org). The authorization form will be provided by the investigative agency. The investigator would check criminal, civil, and credit records, the candidate's driving history, the candidate's SSN, etc.

If you decide to do the investigation yourself you should first check the candidate's employment history and personal references. Then you should check the public records of criminal and civil court cases in San Diego County in the past 10 years. They are available at the following five locations:

Central Dist. Civil	330 W. Broadway	San Diego	92101	<b>(619) 615-6358</b>
Central Dist. Criminal	220 W. Broadway	San Diego	92101	<b>(619) 450-5400</b>
East County Dist.	250 E. Main St.	El Cajon	92020	<b>(619) 456-4100</b>
North County Dist.	325 S. Melrose Dr.	Vista	92083	<b>(760) 201-8600</b>
South County Dist.	500 3rd Ave.	Chula Vista	91910	<b>(619) 746-6200</b>

Or as an employer of an unlicensed person providing non-medical home care to a child, you can get a California criminal history of the candidate from the Bureau of Criminal Identification and Information by asking the candidate to submit fingerprints to the California Department of Justice. This can be done electronically at any Live Scan site in the state. The locations of these sites are listed on the Office of the Attorney General's website at [www.ag.ca.gov/fingerprints/publications/contact.php](http://www.ag.ca.gov/fingerprints/publications/contact.php).

Then to find out whether there are any outstanding San Diego County warrants on the candidate call the County Sheriff's Records and Identification Division at **(858) 974-2110**. All you need is his or her first and last name and birth date. Warrant information is available to the public and it's free. A search of outstanding San Diego County warrants can also be made on the County Sheriff's web site at [www.sdsheriff.net](http://www.sdsheriff.net). Just click on Arrest Warrant Lookup under Online Services. For records of cases and warrants in other counties you must contact the court clerks and sheriffs in those counties.

And be sure to check the local and national sex offender registries. Information on registered sex offenders in California is available on Megan's Law website at [www.meganslaw.ca.gov](http://www.meganslaw.ca.gov). You can search by name, address, city, ZIP code, county, parks, and schools, and obtain a map of approximate offender locations, or a list of offender names. The latter also provides pictures and personal profile information on the offenders. Although this information is updated frequently, its accuracy cannot be guaranteed. Offenders may have moved and failed to notify local law enforcement agencies as required by law; thus, the locations of offenders without established addresses are not included. And remember that not all sex offenders have been caught and convicted, and that most sex offenses are committed by family, friends, or acquaintances of the victim. You can also click on the links on the left of the home page to learn how to protect yourself and your family, facts about sex offenders, and sex offender registration requirements in California, and to obtain answers to frequently asked questions. You should also check the U.S. Department of Justice's National Sex Offender Public Website at [www.nsopw.gov](http://www.nsopw.gov).

### **Supervising a Home Caregiver**

Before the caregiver starts working you should lock up all financial records, checkbooks, credit cards, cash, personal ID information, passwords to any home computers and alarms, etc.

After the caregiver starts working you should go home frequently and conduct unannounced spot checks at different times of the day to evaluate the caregiver's work and make sure he or she is following your instructions. Then you should supply a limited amount of cash for necessities and require receipts and an itemized accounting of all expenditures. And never lend money to the caregiver. If you become suspicious about anything, consider installing a hidden camera to record caregiver's activities.

Some questions to answer in assessing a caregiver's performance include the following:

- Does the caregiver make it difficult for you to visit or talk to the child?
- Does the child seem anxious or exhibit any unusual behavior when the caregiver is present?
- Is the child showing a sudden change in mood or behavior?
- Is any money, medications, or valuables missing?
- Is the mail being intercepted?
- If the child has any lacerations, bruises, or broken bones, how did they occur? And what medical treatment was provided?

Finally, if the caregiver came from an agency, notify the agency immediately if you have any concerns about the caregiver it provided. And fire any caregiver provided by an agency who offers to work independently for less.

## **REPORTING CHILD ABUSE**

Call the County Social Services Department's Child Protective Services Child Abuse Hotline at **(858) 560-2191** or **(800) 344-6000** to report situations in which you suspect that a child has been abused or appears to be at risk of being abused. Your report will be investigated and steps will be taken to protect the child and preserve the family unit. The SDPD will be informed if abuse is involved. If you know that abuse has occurred, you should call SDPD directly at **(619) 531-2000** or **(858) 484-3154**. If the abuse is in progress you should call **911**. Officers will investigate, take steps to protect the victim and prosecute the abuser, and inform the County Social Service Department.

The following are some signs of child abuse:

- Frequent or unexplained injuries
- Injuries that appear to have a pattern such as marks from a hand or belt
- Sexual language, knowledge, interest, or behavior beyond what is normal for the child's age
- Specific comments or complaints about abuse
- Lack of basic needs for food, clothing, and medical care
- Poor hygiene
- Sudden decline in school performance or frequent truancy
- Lack of supervision for long periods of time
- Excessively withdrawn, fearful, or anxious about doing something wrong
- Always watchful and on alert as if waiting for something bad to happen
- Shies away from touches, flinches at sudden movements, or seems afraid to go home
- Changes in behavior, extreme mood swings, withdrawal, fearfulness, and excessive crying
- Bed-wetting, nightmares, fear of going to bed, or other sleep disturbances
- Avoids undressing or wears extra layers of clothing
- Sudden acting out of feelings or aggression, rebellious behavior
- Regression to infantile behavior
- Acts inappropriately adult, e.g., taking care of other children
- Pain, itching, bleeding, fluid, or rawness in private areas
- Fear of certain places, people, or activities, especially being alone with certain people.

## **REPORTING A CHILD WHO APPEARS TO BE LOST**

The NCMEC encourages people to be alert and report situations regarding children who appear to be lost. You can assist the child by doing the following:

- Comfort the child but avoid touching him or her.
- Ask the child if he or she is lost or knows the location of his or her parent or guardian.
- Don't ask too many personal questions. Children are taught not to give out personal information to people they don't know.
- Call **911** and give the dispatcher a description of the child and your location.
- Remain with the child until help arrives. Follow the child if he or she leaves your location.

If you see a child who you recognize from media reports, missing-child alerts, etc., as one who is missing, call **911** and follow the dispatcher's instructions.

### **SDPD AREA STATIONS**

---

Central	2501 Imperial Ave. SD 92102	(619) 744-9500
Eastern	9225 Aero Dr. SD 92123	(858) 495-7900
Mid-City	4310 Landis St. SD 92105	(619) 516-3000
Northeastern	13396 Salmon River Rd. SD 92129	(858) 538-8000
Northern	4275 Eastgate Mall SD 92037	(858) 552-1700
Northwestern	12592 El Camino Real SD 92130	(858) 523-7000
Southeastern	7222 Skyline Dr. SD 92114	(619) 527-3500
Southern	1120 27th St. SD 92154	(619) 424-0400
Western	5215 Gaines St. SD 92110	(619) 692-4800

---